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AN EVOLUTIONAL ARGUMENT FOR THE VALIDITY OF RELIGIOUS FAITH

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1. Under an evolutionary assumption and interpretation of nature, there are three sets of elements which must be considered: the environment, the individual, and the responses which the individual makes to its surroundings. The stimulating environment acts upon organisms, and forces both the nature of the organism and its responses into harmony (adaptation) with itself. The responses, in order to be of value to the organism, must be in accordance with the nature of the environment; these also spring from the nature of the organism and must be, equally, an expression and a measure of the nature of the individual. The structure and essential nature of the individual, if evolved, must come, through the molding effect of the environment, to be in harmony with all those factors of the environment which have a selective power over life, and only with such. Features in the environment, no matter how real or pervasive, can produce no qualities in organisms adjusting the organism to them unless these features have power to influence life for good or ill.

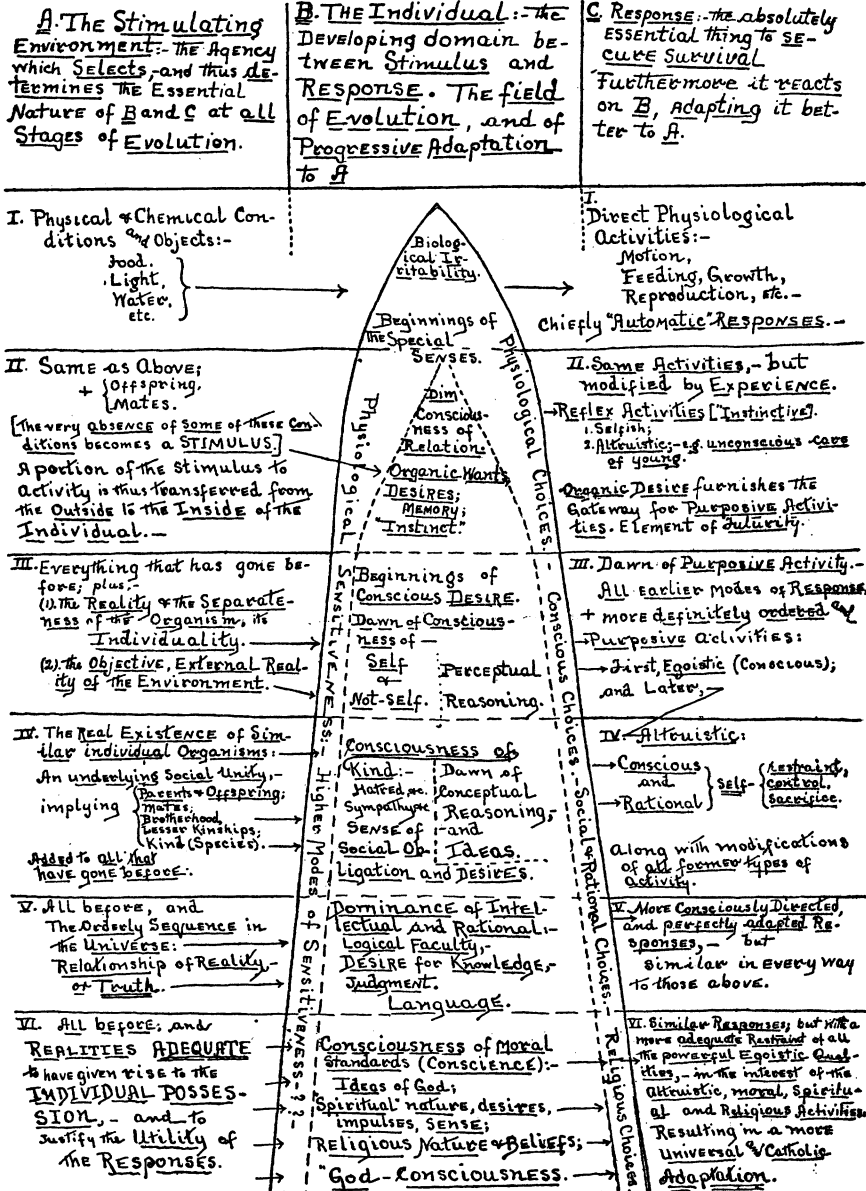
2. Every organic quality, which is definitely persistent and subject to evolution and increase, must have some real and adequate environmental factor, fundamentally important to life, which gives the biological utility to the quality and insures its survival and increase. The evolutionist cannot consistently allow this in respect to the lower physical and physiological characteristics of organisms and deny it in the case of the higher qualities of human personality. These higher qualities are unquestionably persistent and general possessions; they are subject to evolutionary increase; and are useful in adjusting the individual to the vital realities of his environment, as is shown by the evolutionary success of the organisms possessing them. If they are the products of evolution and are derived, as the evolutionist believes, from the lower organic qualities, they are just as close to

reality as were their lower progenitors. This must be true because the lower possessions were successful in their relations, and could never have been displaced, in an evolutionary dispensation, by non-adaptive or false qualities—qualities with no power of adjusting the organism to fundamental reality. Every step, therefore, in the evolutionary series (from unconscious sensitiveness in protoplasm to God-consciousness) equally represents adaptation to something in the environment—something real and adequate to produce and utilize the new quality.

3. The “harmony” which philosophers have always seen between organic, and particularly human, possessions on the one hand, and the environment on the other, is not arbitrary nor “pre-established,” nor mere evidence of supernatural design. This harmony is itself an evolutionary product, a growth-adaptation of the plastic organism to the potent elements in the environment. The special organic qualities, as adaptive results, are always a measure and the best available measure, of the reality and of the nature of the factors in the environment which are capable of producing and sustaining them. The eye as an evolved organ is an organic incarnation of the existence and the nature of light. Furthermore, the eye itself, as a structure, is a better proof of the existence of light and a better index of its nature than is any single sensation which it makes possible. Our most dependable picture of that which is outside the organism is the structure and nature of the organism itself. This of course is true only of those environmental elements which are sufficiently potent in life to stamp themselves on life and thus become mirrored in organic structure.

4. In the accompanying diagram is displayed a parallel of stimuli and responses as they are related to individuality at its various levels. The central part of the diagram represents the increasing complexity of the individual as we pass from the lower to the higher types of life. It is not intended to indicate that the environmental series (*A*) is an evolutionary series. It shows progressively merely because it is apprehended progressively. The central shaft of personality (*B*) is assumed to be a single evolutionary series—from the automatic sensitiveness of protoplasm to conscience and God-consciousness. Responses (*C*) are, on the whole, progressive from apparently direct and unconscious

and egoistic activities toward conscious and altruistic, or social behavior.



5. In respect to the lower organisms we can measure the stimuli (*A*) which are able to influence them, and the response (*C*) which they make. Concerning their individuality (*B*) we can know little except the physical structure. The processes of their personality are practically unknown to us. In the higher stages and in the more complex types of individuals, on the contrary, we believe that we get, through the various aspects of consciousness, a better knowledge of what occurs within "*B*," in addition to our knowledge of the stimuli and responses. If this evolved means of self-appraisal is not reliable at this level and in relation to the self, it is equally unreliable in the estimate of the conditions which surround personality, in the lower levels; and therefore the science which questions either the fact of consciousness or its reliability is itself as futile as any speculation possible to us.

The consistent evolutionist must accept the data of consciousness for two reasons: first, consciousness is the evolutionary outcome of more primitive conditions which clearly suit the organism to its stimuli; and, second, it tends, because of its greater utility in effecting adjustment, to replace these more direct and automatic unconscious modes of response found in the lower organisms. The environment is the relatively fixed and determinative fact. Survival depends absolutely on the suitedness (adaptation) of response (*C*) to stimulus (*A*). The individual (*B*) is perfect and successful in proportion as its nature enables it to react to "*A*" in such a way as to secure right response. The basal physiological sensitiveness which all organisms possess, because of its very directness, is a very successful device to secure adaptive response, if there is any truth in our biological conclusions. We believe that all the later types of sensitiveness, desire, memory, consciousness (of self, not-self, kind, standards, God), reasoning, etc., are derived from it in one great evolutionary series. They are tremendously complex (and are the field of personality), but unless they made the response (*C*) to the real total effective environment more accurate and more successful, they could never have replaced the lower, more direct physiological adjustment. This is the great biological justification of the validity of consciousness, whether of physical external reality, or of the self, or of God.

6. In some of the higher qualities, particularly, we cannot measure

directly the environmental factors which could have produced them. For example we cannot directly measure truth or the moral order, and yet there are human attitudes and activities of practical evolutionary moment which are profoundly influenced by these, and there are other human qualities which purport to adjust the organism to the realities for which these ideas stand. In the absence of the ability to measure directly the environmental factors, we are at liberty to use, in their interpretation, all persistent and useful organic possessions (structures, instincts, desires, intellectual and spiritual qualities) as throwing light upon the nature of the basal reality of the historic environment which has produced them. We may measure the otherwise unmeasurable environment, indirectly, because of the very existence of certain human qualities, if not directly by them. And just as the possession of the sense of thirst is a better index of the existence and nature of water than we can get by any physical measurements, or by any sensuous experience with water, so the very existence of faculties by which we conceive and perceive truth and right is a better index of the existence and evolutionary value of these realities than we can gain from any other possible source.

7. Not only must there be real environmental causes to account for organic possessions, but environmental realities must be adequate to account for the supposed qualities. For example, light may adequately explain the phenomena of vision and the eye, but physical contacts could not do so. Light-stimuli, however potent in their own realm, could not possibly account for the sexual impulse and organs. Physical and chemical relations could not explain the social impulses and qualities of the individual. Nothing short of actual associations of similar individuals could do so. Reality, and other relations of an intellectual level, are necessary, as a stimulus, to account for reasoning. Something more than physical contacts is necessary in an environment to give rise to sympathy, as an organic adaptation. As a mere physical domain could not serve, unaided, to give rise to the chemical sense; and as real light-vibrations must be had to develop and maintain a light-vibration-perceiving apparatus; so nothing but a spiritual domain could be adequate environmental cause, making spiritual qualities of survival value, in organic evolution. Only God in the environment of man

could furnish the groundwork of reality which would make the idea of God of such utility as to secure its persistence and advancement in the evolution of man.

8. Evolution, then, since the first emergence of the most primitive organic individual from the background of its environment, and since the primal institution of the distinction between individual and environment, has been a continuous acting of the total available environment upon the series of individuals, producing a continuous and progressive revelation of the environment (including the immanent God) to progressing individuals; and a growing incarnation of the really powerful elements of the environment (including God) into the warp and woof of advancing and increasingly appreciative personality. This is why there is harmony. This is the ground for the messianic hope that we shall see Him as He is and be like Him.

9. Under an evolutionary dispensation, then,

All personal qualities and activities : Total environmental stimuli :: Effect : Major cause.

The statement of this ratio is the present result of our scientific work; the final evaluation of the ratio is the future work of science. To it we are gradually making approximations.

The detailed analogy (under uniform evolutionary adaptation) may be put thus:

I		II	
<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>
AS EFFECTS	REAL CAUSES	EFFECTS	REAL (?) CAUSES
The eye and sense of sight	Light	Consciousness of self	Human personality
Taste and hunger	Food	Consciousness of not-self	External objective reality
Desire for water	Water	Consciousness of standards (conscience)	Real right; a moral order in universe
Sexual impulse	Mates and mating	Religious nature	Real Obligation to the Casual Agent of universe
Instinct of parental care	Offspring	Religious impulses	
Consciousness of kind	Real kindred	Religious beliefs	
Sense of obligation to fellows	Actual social contact and organization	"Spiritual" qualities	Spiritual reality
Logical sense	Orderly sequence in nature	Ideas of God	
Desire for knowledge	Real truth	God-consciousness	God
Altruism and the social emotions	A genuine social order	Sense of obligation to God	

But for "*b*," "*a*" could not have existed in an evolutionary régime. Could *A* persist and increase without *B* to have caused it?

In group I, of causes and effects, we think, as realists (and evolutionists must be realists), we can measure both the cause and effect in terms which science respects; we can in a way measure both the

strength of the internal quality and the environmental factor which produces it. Therefore it is from this group that we derive our generalization that the organism must in the end, no matter what its original nature, come into harmony, so far as its qualities are concerned, with such of its environing conditions as are vitally important to life and evolution, or disappear. Here we derive whatever science we have. Here is where we make our experimental evaluation of our ratio. In exact proportion as reliance is to be put in this evaluation, there is ground to carry our principle into the whole realm of life.

Group II of the supposed environmental causes holds the great philosophical and religious questions of all time. In this group we personally recognize our possession of individual qualities (*A*)—mostly states of consciousness, which no philosophy can escape or deny. We are just as conscious of them as we are of the personal possessions in group I, *a*. The question is whether there is anything in the environment to correspond to these personal qualities. If the evolutionary assumption is true we are not at liberty to doubt that there must be some reality which could have produced them. What realities could have been responsible for them? There is no direct way to measure the environmental agent, as in the former group. We are compelled to use our analogy and estimate the environmental reality from the nature of the organic possession which is supposed to mirror it. The principle of evolutionary adaptation is the only one we are able to apply which will take us back of the theory of an arbitrarily “pre-established harmony” and the “ontological” argument.

No organic quality can continually stand, and persist in developing, in arbitrary or false relation to the environment. Every higher quality is, by the hypothesis, the derivative of lower qualities which were themselves in successful relation to reality, and of survival value; unless the new quality were also in agreement with the vital realities—indeed in better agreement than that which it replaced—it would never have replaced its predecessor.

We have seen that the truth of even the first group of causes and effects—indeed of all science—is dependent upon the truthfulness of the consciousness of the self and the not-self. If these are not reliable, no science and no philosophy are possible.

It becomes doubly true then that the validity of the physiological sensations, that belief in self, belief in the real objective environment, and belief in God and spiritual reality are, from the evolutionary point of view, on exactly the same level. And since all science rests on the belief in the real existence of the external world, substantially as it appears to us, the evidence for the existence of God, and for the essential validity of the broadly accepted and persistent religious and philosophical conclusions of the race is as strong as the evidence for any conclusion whatsoever.

10. There is a disposition on the part of thinkers to feel that the human desire to find these higher realities true really weakens any argument for their existence, by giving a personal bias to our conclusions concerning them. The desire for continued life and for the fuller development of virtues which are not wholly unhindered here is held to have given birth to the belief in immortality and in continued moral and spiritual growth. As a mere individual conclusion this would be true. On the other hand, these desires and beliefs must be accounted for just as really as the desire for water which we call the sense of thirst. In accordance with our principle, these desires are themselves the surest measure of the reality for which they seem to stand. They are general and persistent human possessions; they are evolutionary products; they are efficient agencies in producing human evolution; they have utility in a survival way. Are not the existence and evolutionary efficiency of these higher desires and beliefs just as valid organic proof of the existence and vital power of the realities for which they stand, as hunger is for the existence of food and its controlling rôle in life?